

# interpretation

a journal of political philosophy

1

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# interpretation

## a journal of political philosophy

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## HEGEL, MARX AND CHRISTIANITY\*

ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE

translated by Hilail Gildin\*\*

An unwarmed reader could be misled by the title of Mr. Niel's book. In fact, what is involved is not an abstract analysis of the Hegelian category of *Mediation* (*Vermittlung*). It is the whole concrete content of Hegel's philosophy that is set forth. And it must be said that the author has executed a real tour de force by summarizing in less than 400 pages almost the totality of the Hegelian writings.

Moreover, the title chosen by Mr. Niel is perfectly legitimate, and it bears witness to a profound understanding of the general structure of Hegel's thought. Indeed, to say *Mediation* is to say *Dialectic*, for all that is *mediated* is *dialectical*, and all that is *dialectical* is *mediated*. Now in Hegel Dialectic is anything but a method of thought; it is not an artifice of philosophical exposition: Dialectic is the very structure of concrete reality itself, and it only penetrates into philosophical thought to the extent that philosophical thought correctly describes this concrete reality taken as a whole. To analyze *Mediation* (i.e., *Dialectic*) in Hegel's philosophy is therefore to analyze that philosophy itself in its whole concrete content. And that is precisely what Mr. Niel does in his book.

One might, nevertheless, regret the fact that the author did not devote a chapter to a more or less formal analysis of the very notion of *Mediation* or *Dialectic*. And I must say that wherever he incidentally speaks of this notion in general terms what he says about it is not, in my opinion, absolutely correct (see especially p. 70, note 10; pp. 102-04 and p. 357).

The relative lack of understanding of *Dialectic* in Hegel does not prevent Mr. Niel from giving a perfectly correct summary of the dialectical philosophy which he sets forth. This lack of understanding is, however, very grave in the sense that it inspires commentaries which give a fundamentally false meaning to correctly summarized theories. This apparent paradox is explained by the fact that Hegelian dialectical texts are necessarily, and some-

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\*This long review essay of Henri Niel's *De la Médiation dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris, 1945) originally appeared in *Critique*, I (1946), 339-366. The permission of *Critique* to publish an English translation of this essay is gratefully acknowledged.

\*\* Translator's note: Double brackets and double parentheses represent insertions by the translator. Other brackets and parentheses are reproduced from the original. In the places where "lutte" could not be translated by "fight" and "dépasser" by "surpass" the French words have been supplied between double parentheses or double brackets. James H. Nichols' recent translation of Kojève (*Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom [New York, 1969]) has furnished the translator with many useful suggestions. Jonathan Mandelbaum's helpful advice is also gratefully acknowledged.

times intentionally, ambiguous (as Mr. Niel himself acknowledges, for example pp. 17, 214 and 332). The same text, whether it be directly quoted or correctly summarized, can mean very different things depending on the way in which it is read. For instance, Mr. Niel reads the texts and his own summaries in such a way as to give them, with many reservations, moreover (see pp. 214, 351 and 369), a theistic and even a theological meaning. Now in reality these summarized texts set forth a radically atheistic philosophy.

It must be said, however, that this essential misunderstanding, which has lasted for as long as Hegelianism exists, is only possible because Hegelian atheism has a very special character. Hegel is not atheistic in the usual sense of the word, for he does not reject the Christian *notion* of God and does not even deny its reality. And so, one often finds theological formulas in Hegelian philosophy. But, in the deepest sense, this philosophy is nevertheless radically atheistic and non-religious. For the only and the unique *reality* of the Christian notion of God for this philosophy is Man, taken in the totality of his historical evolution accomplished in the midst of nature, this totality being completed (= perfect) through the Wise Man (Hegel), who reveals it itself to itself in and through the *absolute Knowledge* which he has of it. And it is enough to correctly interpret the very notions of Mediation or of Dialectic (or, if you prefer, of Negativity, of Time, of History) to understand that it cannot be otherwise.

In what follows, I will try to recall the genuine meaning of the Hegelian Dialectic (= Mediation), in order to permit the reader who does not know it to understand correctly the excellent summary which Mr. Niel has made of the work of Hegel, in spite of the generally debatable commentaries which surround the expositions properly so called.

The vulgar sciences deal with *abstractions*. For they are concerned with particular entities which they isolate "by abstraction" from the whole real universe which these entities in reality form part of. Hegelian philosophy, on the other hand, or more accurately absolute Knowledge, is concerned with Being in its concrete reality. In other words, this Knowledge does not abstract from anything (not even from itself) and reveals (= describes) the *totality* of what *is*. One can therefore say that absolute Knowledge has Totality as its "object"; this Knowledge does nothing but analyze and reconstruct Totality out of its constitutive elements (*Momente*) which are isolated by analysis. But the totality of what is also implies the Knowledge which reveals this totality, to the extent that this Knowledge is itself real. One can therefore just as well say that Totality, real concrete Being, is at the same time revealed "object" and revealing "subject." And it is precisely for this reason that concrete Being is *Totality*; or, and this is the same thing, that it is the True (*das Wahre*), or Concept (*Begriff*), or absolute Idea.

However, in saying that real concrete Being is Totality, Concept, or Idea, Hegel is enunciating something other than this truism, which reminds us that the *concrete* real is constituted by *all* that exists. The term *Totality* has, in Hegel, a technical, or, if you please, a "dialectical" meaning. Totality is the

synthesis of Identity (= thesis) and of Negativity (= antithesis). And it is precisely because real concrete Being is not only Identity (with itself) but also Negativity (of itself) that this Being is at the same time “subject” and “object,” that is to say, *being* revealing itself to itself through (discursive) thought and *thought* which realizes itself in being (as truth) and thinks itself in speaking of its own concrete reality or of the totality of what *is*.

The totality of what *is* does not remain eternally *identical* to itself. To be sure, it always remains what it is, namely Totality (taken as Identity). But it also is always *other* than it is; it therefore negates what it is, it negates itself as it is and it is not Totality (taken as Negativity) except as the totality of its successive auto-negations. In other words, real concrete Being *changes* and is nothing other than (*is* the same as) the totality of its real changes. That is to say, Totality is neither pure identical Being (*Sein*), nor simple other than Being, that is to say, Nothingness (*Nichts*), but the synthesis of the two or Becoming (*Werden*). Or else, again, Totality is the *nihilation* of the Nothingness in Being through the annihilation of (identical) Being: it is the Temporality of the Spatiality which *is*. Totality is therefore time which *is* as space, or space which only *is* to the extent that it is *annihilated* as time by *becoming* past.

One can also say that the temporalization of Being subtracts the being from Being. For past being does not differ from present being except for the fact that it *is* not any longer, just as future being *is* not yet. But neither does the *concept* “Being” differ from Being itself except for the fact that it *is* not in the same way that Being *is*. One can therefore say that temporalization (= Negativity) transforms Being (= Identity) into the Concept of Being, so that Totality (= Identity + Negativity), since it is Concept-which-*is* or Being-which-*is*-conceived, is, in effect, at the same time “subject” and “object,” being and thought, in a word, *absolute Idea* or *Knowledge*.

Hegel expresses this “dialectical” (= trinitarian) conception of real concrete Being also by saying that this Being is not only *in itself* (*an sich*; = Thesis or Identity), but also *for itself* (*für sich*; = Antithesis or Negativity); it is *in and for itself* (*an und für sich*; = Synthesis or Totality). Or else, he also says that real concrete Being is always *dialectically-suppressed* (*aufgehoben*): in and through the Antithesis, Being is *suppressed* or negated as Thesis or as given Being; but just as *A* is preserved in *non-A*, negated Being is *preserved* in its being, for the Antithesis also *is*; finally, just as *non-A* is determined not only by the *non* but also by the *A*, although it is other than *A*, that is to say *B*, – so too Being which is preserved in and through its negation is other than Being which is negated; and one can say that negated-preserved-Being is *sublimated* in its being, for having negated itself as given, it has transformed or formed (*gebildet* = educated) itself, so that it is no longer “brute matter” but “wrought product.” Or else, finally, Hegel summarizes all that precedes by saying that real concrete Being is *mediated* (*vermittelt*) in its being. Being (*(L'être)*) is Totality, i.e., Being-which-*is*-conceived or Idea-which-*is*-real, because the Identity of Being is *mediated* by Negativity. Being negates its given being, and by thus temporalizing itself through auto-negation, it creates itself through this Mediation as revealed or as thought of Being.

Such, in brief, is the “dialectic” of Being *on the ontological plane*. And one can already see on this plane that this “dialectic” is essentially atheistic. (One of the principal “dialectical” texts which prove this is, moreover, quoted by Mr. Niel, p. 80, note 28).

Indeed, Being is Totality, that is to say, thought or “subject” that one could be tempted to call “God,” only to the extent that it implies Negativity. Now this Negativity is pure nothingness (*reines Nichts*) apart from “brute” given Being (Being which only a “pagan” could have characterized as “divine”). The “subject” which Hegel has in view does not, therefore, create Being out of nothing. On the contrary, it can only be, or create itself, by *negating* given being which it therefore *presupposes*: it can only derive its own being from the being which is given to it and which is therefore independent of it. The being or the nihilation of the “Subject” is the temporalizing annihilation of the Being which must be *before* being annihilated: the being of the “Subject” therefore necessarily has a beginning. And since it is the (temporal) nihilation of the nothingness in Being, since it is a nothingness which nihilates (as Time), the “Subject” is essentially the negation of itself: it therefore necessarily has an end. Now if this is the case, it is quite evident that the “Subject” in question is certainly not “divine.” (In the text quoted on p. 80 [[by Mr. Niel]], Hegel says: “The annihilating inquietude of the infinite is only by the being of what it annihilates.” And it is clear that the “infinite” which is only a negation of the finite, only a non-finite, is not autonomous in its being and therefore does not have the character of a “divine” infinite.)

All this becomes much clearer when one descends *to the metaphysical plane*.

Here real-concrete-Being is objective-Reality (*Wirklichkeit*). And, of course, there is objective reality only where there are no abstractions effected by a “subject.” Objective-Reality is therefore, by definition, Totality. Now this objectively real totality is called “Spirit” (*Geist*) in Hegel. The whole metaphysical problem therefore reduces itself to the question of knowing what Spirit is “in truth,” or “objectively,” that is to say, as it reveals itself to itself.

It is evident, in the first place, that objective-Reality is not only Nature (and that is precisely why Hegel calls this Reality “Spirit”). For reality implies *all* that is objectively real, and therefore all that is realized for all here and now. However, now there are here not only “natural,” “brute” or given realities, such as wood for example, but also wood transformed into paper by work and words written on this paper, words having a *meaning*, and a meaning which reveals natural reality (for example, as not by itself exhausting objective Reality). In other words, the reality of what we call the “historical world” and the “universe of discourse,” or – in brief – “man,” is just as objective as the reality of what we call the “natural world” or “nature.” Objective Reality or Spirit is therefore neither only Nature, or the non-human world independent of human reality, nor only Man, or human reality independent of the natural world. Spirit is natural-World-implying-man, or, and this is the same thing, Man-in-the-world. And just as natural objective reality is not such or such a thing taken in isolation, i.e., in abstraction from

the real ties that attach it to its spatial surroundings in the present and connect it to its past and to its future, but the indissoluble whole of the natural spatio-temporal world – so too objective human reality is not such or such an “individual” taken in fictitious isolation, but the whole historical evolution of humanity, which is accomplished in the midst of the natural world.

Objective-Reality is not Nature but Spirit because the universe in fact implies man and because man is essentially something other than an animal, a plant or an inanimate thing. While living in the midst of nature, man leads a life there which is “contra-natural,” which only becomes possible to the extent that he creates a non-natural, technical or “historical” world. This world can only be created by man through a trans-formation or “formation” of the natural given (= raw materials), i.e. by an objectively real *negation* of natural objective reality, this negation being *Action* (*Tun*) in the proper and strong sense of the word. Objective human reality is therefore a negating “antithesis” of identical or “thetic” Nature. And that is why objective-Reality is in fact “synthetic” or “mediated,” viz., “dialectically suppressed,” that is to say, “spiritual”: it is objectively real Spirit.

Man in his objective reality is Action. That is to say, he is only real to the extent that he really or “objectively” *negates* natural reality. And this means that he is *transcendent* with respect to nature. On the one hand, he is *free* as regards it, for he can *negate* nature in its given reality and is not, therefore, determined by it; and he can even negate himself as given or as “natural.” On the other hand, in realizing himself through *negation*, man does not arise out of nature as a result of a “natural” evolution: he *creates* himself freely in creating the historical world. Finally, in *negating* given nature, he sets himself in opposition to it and opposes to it what is not yet objectively real, while bringing this un-real into relation with reality: he opposes to the natural given projects (= ideas) which he realizes by Action that negates the given. He therefore opposes himself to nature in the way the “subject” opposes itself to the “object.” Being Action, he is also Discourse having a meaning, discourse which *reveals* through its meaning the real which is opposed to man as well as the real which creates itself as human reality. Thus, being Man-in-the-world, Spirit is “flesh” become “Logos.” It is an objective reality which has a *meaning* and which therefore is a *value*. It is a free creative reality which *reveals* the real (= Totality) and reveals itself as real. And it is, if you please, *infinite*, at least in the sense that it is non-finite; for in being able to *negate* the finitude of the given, whatever it be, it is not limited by this finitude, limitation or “determination” (*Bestimmtheit*).

The metaphysical anthropology of Hegel therefore preserves the fundamental categories of Christian theology. But can one say that the Hegelian transcendence of the Spirit is anything other than the transcendence of man with respect to nature? Can one say that, for Hegel, objective -Reality is anything other than natural and human? Can one say that the Spirit of which he speaks is God?

Many perfectly univocal texts compel one to reply in the negative. One of them, which is late, moreover, is quoted by Mr. Niel (p. 368, note 15) without

his drawing the inevitable conclusion from it. "It seems," Hegel says there, "that the *Weltgeist* has succeeded now [i.e., at the moment at which universal history is completed by the advent of the Wise Man or of Hegelian absolute Knowledge] in grasping *itself* as absolute Spirit . . . . The struggle ((*lutte*)) of the finite consciousness with the absolute consciousness which *seems* external to it has ceased. The absolute consciousness *has received* the reality of which it *was deprived* earlier." [Italics mine.]

This text is very clear. The *Weltgeist* is humanity in its historical evolution in the midst of the natural world. At the end of this evolution, in the person of Hegel, man "grasps himself as ((the)) absolute Spirit" which was earlier called "God": Hegel understands and proclaims that what was called "God" is, in reality, humanity, taken in the completed totality of its historical evolution. Before the advent of Hegelian knowledge, "absolute consciousness *seems* to be *external*" to man. And that is precisely why pre-Hegelian man calls it "God." But that was only an illusion. In fact, theology always was an unconscious anthropology; man projected into the beyond, without realizing it, the idea that he had of himself, or the ideal of his own perfection that he pursued. Now, at the end of history (and it is precisely because of this that it is completed) the most sublime ideal implied in Christian theology is *realized* by man. Man therefore no longer surpasses himself, and his given reality (which he *created* earlier) is now no longer a limit or a "determination" for him. One can therefore say that "the finite consciousness has ceased to be finite." Now, it is "in that way" that God "has received" the objective reality of which he "was deprived earlier." Before the completion of history, i.e., before the perfection of man, the "absolute consciousness" was only an (unconsciously anthropological) externalized "representation" (*Vorstellung*) projected into the beyond and named "God." The absolute Spirit is only objectively real as finite or human consciousness which has ceased to be finite by enclosing itself upon itself in the cyclical movement of absolute Knowledge, that is to say, the complete auto-comprehension of its completed or perfect realization. The Absolute Spirit is therefore "infinite" only in the sense that it is non-finite: it is infinite through the completed active negation of the finitude of the identical or natural given which it *presupposes*. And this is why the Spirit is not God, but simply the spatio-temporal totality of objective natural and human reality or Man-in-the-world.

But isolated texts matter little. It is the whole dialectical philosophy of Hegel that is incompatible with theism of any kind whatever.

On the one hand, the spiritual which is "dialectical" is a *negation* of the natural; it is therefore pure nothingness "before" the existence of nature and it would be pure nothingness if nature did not exist or if it ceased to exist; there is no trans-mundane, that is to say "transcendent," Spirit in the theistic sense of the term. On the other hand, "dialectical" man creates himself as human by negating himself as natural, or, generally, as "given"; it is in this way that he *becomes*, that he is "historical," by becoming in time other than he is at any given moment; but he remains man while surpassing himself; and that is why the spiritual realizes itself by transcending natural reality

without ever being able to transcend human reality: all that is spiritual is non-natural, but all that is non-natural is human and human only.

An attempt has been made to interpret Hegel's dialectical metaphysics by saying that it is the description of the "becoming of God" ("pantheism"). But even if one admits, *per impossible*, that the notion of the "becoming of God" has a meaning, it must be said that one cannot, without abusing language, characterize as "divine" the becoming which Hegel has in mind. For, since it has a beginning and an end, that historical becoming is essentially finite in the proper sense of the term. History necessarily has a beginning, for if man is the negation of nature, a world without men must exist before there are men in the world. And history also necessarily has an end. Or, more precisely, one cannot say anything whatever that is conclusive or true unless history has an end or is even in effect completed. Indeed, if there is Totality and not only Identity, that is to say, if Being is Becoming, the becoming (= change) of being will perpetually transform into relative error the (relative) truth of the discourse which correctly reveals being such as it was at a given moment (in its *identity* with itself). In order for there to be (absolute) truth in what becomes, becoming must be completed. Now it is *human* reality which negates, changes or changes itself in being. It is therefore *history* which has to be completed in order for there to be a truth of which one can say that is universally and eternally (= necessarily) valid, that is to say, a truth in the proper sense of the word. Thus, either there is no Truth, no Knowledge (*Wissen*) properly so called, and the only possible attitude is that of Skepticism (with its counterpart, irrational [= in-coherent] Faith [*Glauben*] which never succeeds in "looping the loop" of its discourse or reasoning, the "gap" in the reasoning being precisely the "revealed" notion of the divine), or else history has an end and the Spirit is finite in its objective manifestations, being the *human* Spirit. In any case, there is therefore no possible *theology*, there is no *science* (*Wissenschaft*) of God.

To be sure, the end of history is not a limit *imposed* on man *from without*: history is, if you please, unlimited. For man can negate all that he wants ((to negate)), and he only ceases to negate and to vary if he no longer *wants* to do so. He therefore does not complete his becoming unless he is perfectly *satisfied* (*Befriedigt* = sated; see above: "the struggle [[lutte]] of the finite consciousness with the absolute consciousness . . . has ceased") by what he *is*; or, more precisely, by what he has *done*, – since he has *created* himself (through the negation of what did not satisfy him outside of him and within himself). And since man is alone in being able to negate and to negate himself, that which satisfies him perfectly is *perfect* in the strong sense of the term: it is something which *cannot* be surpassed *any more*. Thus, Hegel preserves the notions of (satisfied) perfection and of (perfect) satisfaction which, up to him, had been the exclusive possession of theistic thought. But in him these notions have an atheistic meaning, for the Being which is perfect in and through its satisfaction and satisfied in and through its perfection is not God but a man in the world: – the Wise Man possessing absolute Knowledge and in this way *being* the Truth (= Logos).

The atheism of the ontological and metaphysical "dialectic," which I have just analyzed briefly, is in perfect accord with the phenomenological "dialectic" of Hegel.

When one descends from the metaphysical plane to the phenomenological plane, objective-Reality becomes empirical-Existence (*Dasein*). The real becomes "phenomenon": i.e., the real "reveals" itself as a whole ((consisting)) of "objects" opposed to a multiplicity of "subjects" endowed with the capacity for speech; or else, again, the real "appears" (*erscheint*) as the speaking existence of men who speak of themselves and of other men, as well as of all that is not themselves. Now, according to Hegel, this existence is *essentially* finite or mortal and it is exclusively because it is mortal that it is revelatory and revealed. There is "revelation" only where there is finitude and death. And so "God" must die in order to "reveal" himself completely and definitively (e.g., Christ); i.e., he must become "man" and therefore cease to be "God" (the only – theistic – error of Christianity is the Resurrection); as long as he remains "God" he is necessarily hidden (*abscons*) (precisely because God is not, because there is no God). If there are "phenomena," that is to say, if there are revealed and revelatory existences, this is uniquely, says Hegel, because there are on earth men who are *mortal* in the strong sense of the term, i.e., able, on the one hand, to voluntarily perish, without any "biological necessity" (risk of life in a fight for pure prestige) and, on the other hand, (in absolute Knowledge) able to become fully conscious of their essential finitude (while being fully satisfied by this very ((experience" of)) becoming conscious). Now if man is truly mortal, if he is annihilated in and through death, there is no God.<sup>1</sup> For the "divine," or the "transcendent" in the sense of the trans-mundane, is, in the final analysis, nothing but the "natural place" (or Aristotelian "topos," imaginary to boot) of men "after their death": the existence of God can only be the afterlife or the resurrection of man (cf. the evangelistic "good tidings").

This implicitly atheistic finitude of the phenomenological dialectic appears at the very moment at which the young Hegel discovers the fact of dialecticity for the first time. This discovery was made, moreover, on the phenomenological plane. And Mr. Niel is right to stress that the first dialectical human phenomenon which presented itself to Hegel was the phenomenon of Love (*Liebe*). Now it is the love between essentially mortal beings which is at issue.

Love is dialectical because it is Totality and not Identity pure and simple. The Lovers (*Liebende*) are united and one. But their absolute unity is a union of two beings who are "separate," essentially autonomous or different (difference = negation; Negativity). This is why the "totality" of both lovers is something other than each of these lovers considered in his "identity" with

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<sup>1</sup> Suicide à la Kirilov, i.e., a death which is voluntarily and consciously self-inflicted without any *external cause*, limits the omnipotence of all those who are not the one who commits suicide; and therefore also the omnipotence of "God," who thus ceases to be "divine." For that only is "divine" which can act on me without my being able to act on it or against it in such a way that the action would be equal to the reaction.

himself: their “totality” is the child. And it is because the child is totality (“re-unification” of the lovers) and not only identity that he is an educable and educated human being. Now the child is totality because the parents are “separated” in spite of their amorous union, since they are free and autonomous individuals. And they are that only because they are *mortal* (each having to die for himself, in spite of the amorous tie which attaches him to the other). Thus it is because the parents are mortal that the child is human. And he is also the death (= Negativity) of his parents not only on the biological plane but also on the human plane. For he is himself human only because his parents educate him. But in educating him, they prepare a “new generation” which will relegate them and the ideas they have of themselves and of the world to the nothingness of the historical past, which will only live in the memory (*Erinnerung*) of the child. Love, death and historicity, that is to say, the humanity of man, are therefore interdependent from the beginning of Hegel’s dialectical analyses.

However, this first sketch of dialectical phenomenology did not satisfy Hegel. He does not tell us why. But one can assume, with Mr. Niel, that he abandoned (or, more precisely, transformed) the dialectic of love because it did not account for the phenomenon of history. To be sure, the dialectical conception of love enabled one to understand the historicity of man. But starting from it, one could not succeed in “deducing” (= reconstructing a *posteriori*, i.e. “understanding”) the concrete content of universal history. And so, between 1800 and 1806, one sees a new phenomenological dialectic with a distinctly historical orientation appear in the various writings of Hegel. In the writings we possess, the new dialectic is without explicit ties to the dialectic of love. But one could, it seems, restore the connection as follows.

What is human about love is the fact that desire is not related directly (= “immediately”; *unmittelbar*) to a natural empirical entity. The desire for this entity (the body) is “mediated” (*vermittelt*) by the very desire of the one whom one desires: an animal desires the female (sexuality), a man desires the desire of the woman (eroticism). At the limit, amorous desire is a desire for love itself, the one who loves wants to be *loved*, and he can be “satisfied” by this reciprocal love alone, without any “materialization.” Now it is characteristic of love to attribute an absolute (= universal) value to the exclusive uniqueness (= “particularity”) of the one whom one loves (“there is no one but you on earth and in heaven”). To love is therefore to realize a synthesis of the particular (= Identity) and the universal (= Negativity, since universality is a *negation* of particularity); and it is to constitute oneself as such a synthesis, that is to say, as a “totality.”

But in fact the amorous “totality” is essentially *limited*. That is why, in the opinion of all, the existence of a man truly worthy of the name cannot be exhausted by amorous satisfactions. And that is why, in the opinion of Christians themselves, love is not, even in the universalized form of “charity,” the true mover of universal history. Love is essentially limited because it attributes an absolute value not to the action (*Tun*) but to the given-being (*Sein*) of the beloved: one loves someone “without any reason,” that is to

say, simply because he *is*, and not because of what he does. Now given-being is limited by the very fact that it is given, that is to say, identical to itself and therefore different from all that is not it. Only negating action can surpass the limits which are opposed to it, and in this way universalize the very being of the one who acts and who creates himself through the active negation of the given-being which he himself is. Love, which is related to given-being, does not presuppose action and does not engender truly active (= negating) behavior. It therefore remains essentially passive, or better, ineffectual or inoperative. And it remains eternally limited by the static limits of the being to which it is related. This is why love can at the very most found a human Family with a limited natural foundation (barely enlarged by a “circle of friends”) which, in the course of history, narrows as it evolves. It has never created a State in which citizens act with a view to its universal expansion.

In order to account for the phenomenon of history and of historical man, it is therefore necessary to replace the limited and passive dialectic of love by a universal dialectic of action. And that is what Hegel does by *universalizing* his first amorous dialectic. The “lover” wants to be recognized as an absolute value by the beloved (*(par l'être aimé)*) (or, at the very most, by the necessarily restricted group of his “relatives” and “friends”). Historical man aspires to the *universal* recognition of the absolute value of his particularity: he wants to be “the only one of his kind” and nevertheless “universally valid.” And since the limits of his given-being, as well as the given structure of the natural and human world which surrounds him, oppose themselves to that *universal* recognition of his *particularity*, he trans-forms that world and trans-forms himself through a sequence of negating actions. These are the actions which gain him recognition and it is as agent that he is recognized. It is the whole ((consisting)) of the negating actions of particulars accomplished with a view to universal recognition which constitutes the concrete content of universal history. And the true being of man *is* this historical *action*, which “mediates” his natural given-being through the universalizing negation of his particularity.

Mr. Niel is wrong when he says (see for example pp. 16 and 255) that the idea of this “mediation” through history, that is to say through the historical action of particulars for their universal recognition, only appears belatedly in Hegel’s thought. According to Mr. Niel (see pp. 16ff.), mediation through love is first replaced by “psychological mediation” (*Phenomenology of Spirit*), then by mediation through “speculative reflection” (*Logic and Encyclopedia*), whereas the “identity between logic and history” was only recognized by Hegel “at the end.” Generally speaking, Mr. Niel presents the chronological sequence of the writings which he summarizes as so many stages in the evolution of Hegelian thought. Now, in fact, this is not at all the case. The evolution of Hegel’s thought is completed at the very moment at which he discovers (1800) the dialectic of Recognition (*Anerkennen*) or of Action (*Tat*), which he immediately substitutes for the dialectic of love. From that day on, during the 32 years which there remained for him to live, Hegel did nothing but set forth the diverse complementary aspects of the dialectic the general

schema of which he discovered at the end of his juvenile period. He begins by describing the totality of the phenomenological aspect in his *Phenomenology*. Then, in the *Logic*, he completely analyzes the ontological aspect. Finally, the whole metaphysical aspect is given to us in the *Encyclopedia*. As for later publications,<sup>2</sup> Hegel simultaneously describes in them the phenomenological, metaphysical and ontological aspects of the various "constitutive elements" (*Momente*) of this same total dialectic which realizes itself and reveals itself as universal history; elements that are political, legal, aesthetic, religious and, finally, philosophical.

Having discovered the notion of Recognition, Hegel finds himself in possession of the key notion of his whole philosophy. Therefore it is through the analysis of this fundamental notion that one understands the arrangement of the different aspects and elements of the Hegelian dialectic, as well as the mutual relations between Hegel's philosophical writings.

The desire for recognition is in the final analysis the desire *for a desire*. For to want to be recognized as a value is to want to be "desired" in the broad sense of the word ("admired," for example). Now every desire (hunger, for example) is not an empirical reality, but the presence of the absence of such a reality (of food, for example). If one acts on the basis of a desire for a desire, one therefore acts on the basis of what *does not* (yet) *exist* in the natural or given world. Thus, the being which creates itself in and through an action of this kind (or, better yet, as such an action) is itself a being which is non-natural, that is to say, which is "spiritual" or human in the strong sense of the word. But the spiritual is only objectively real to the extent that it enters into inter-action with natural objective reality and can surpass (negate) it, should the occasion arise. Man is therefore real as human only to the extent that he *negates* himself as given, i.e., as "natural" or animal, on the basis of the desire for recognition alone. In other words, man only realizes himself in and through the risk of his animal life incurred in the course of a fight for pure prestige. Now such a fight to the death (*Kampf auf Leben und Tod*) becomes necessary as soon as two desires for recognition meet each other. For if, in fact, one can only be satisfied if one is "recognized" by someone whom one oneself "recognizes," man does not know this at the beginning. At the beginning, one wants to be "recognized" by all, without "recognizing" anyone in return. And since, by definition, the desire for recognition is stronger than the animal instinct for self-preservation, both men, animated by the desire for one-sided recognition, will fight until one of them dies.

But the dead man no longer is, and one obviously cannot be recognized by what does not exist. In order for there to be actual recognition and therefore

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<sup>2</sup> Apart from the *Philosophy of Right*, they consist mainly of lecture notes edited by Hegel's students and published after his death. One therefore cannot consider these writings as strictly genuine. It is therefore inadmissible, as has been done only too often, to found an interpretation of the whole of Hegelian thought on them. This remark, moreover, does not apply to Mr. Niel.

*objective reality* which is human (for man is only human, and at the same time “objective,” as “recognized”), it is necessary that one of the adversaries consent to recognize the other without being recognized by him: one must submit to the other. This decision to interrupt the fight by submitting, although it takes place on the basis of the fear (*Furcht*) of death, is just as “free” (= unpredictable) or “non-natural” as the decision to start the fight and to fight it to the finish. Nothing predisposes the future victor to victory, just as nothing predisposes the future vanquished to his defeat. It is through an act of absolute freedom that the adversaries are created as vanquished and victor, in and through a fight for prestige that is freely begun. And that is why the vanquished is just as human, though in a different way, as the victor himself: if one is the Master, the other is the Slave, and it is evident that there is neither Mastery (*Herrschaft*) nor Slavery (*Knechtschaft*) in the natural or animal world.

Man therefore does not constitute his humanity in isolation. By creating himself in and through a fight to the death for recognition, he necessarily comes out of it as the Master of a slave, or as the Slave of a master. And this means that this struggle creates human reality as an essentially *social* reality, in the precise sense of the word. But it also creates it as a *political* reality, for the man who is recognized by others in his human reality and dignity is by this very fact recognized politically: he is the Citizen (*Bürger*) of the State formed by those who recognize him and whom he recognizes in turn.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the reality constituted by the struggle for recognition is also a *legal* reality. For if this fight is started over a thing or a woman, it is not for the pure and simple possession of the thing or the woman that it is carried on (otherwise it would be a purely animal fight). The one fights against the other in order to make this other “recognize” his “exclusive right” to the thing or to the woman: man therefore fights in the final analysis for *right* ((*pour le droit*)). And that is why, at the end of the fight for recognition, the thing as legal *property* (legitimate wife) as well as man as owner (husband) or as “legal person” ((“*sujet juridique*”)) in general are created.

The analysis of the notion of Recognition therefore reveals to us the origin and the nature of the legal, political and social constitutive elements of human or historical existence. But this analysis makes us see and understand many other things as well.

In order to realize or “objectify” one-sided recognition by the slave, the

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<sup>3</sup> In truth, Hegel does not explain how a Master can be recognized by another Master. In other words, he does not explain the genesis of the State. And that is the most important gap in his phenomenology. One could, however, allow that the state is born from the mutual recognition of the victors of a *collective* fight for recognition. If several men fight together against common adversaries whom they end by enslaving, they can mutually recognize each other as Masters without having fought among themselves. “Fellow citizen” would therefore be at the beginning identical to “brother-in-arms.” But there is also the phenomenon of the political “leader” ((“*chef*”)) which Hegel does not analyze in his writings: the superiority (= authority) of one of the Masters can be recognized by the others without their becoming his slaves as a result of this.

master compels the slave to *work* for him. This forced work for the exclusive profit of the master is accomplished against the natural instincts of the slave. This is therefore one more action which is “against nature,” that is to say, which is a “spiritual” or specifically human action. And it is this essentially human Work (*Arbeit*) which trans-forms the very essence of the natural world by creating in the midst of nature the *technical* world within which universal history unfolds.

By working, man opposes himself to nature, because he trans-forms it, that is to say, negates it as given. And one can say that by working man opposes himself to nature in the way that the “subject” opposes itself to the “object” while standing in a relation to it. For the slave works at the command of the master. Now, what is natural desire in the master (desire to eat, for example) is only an “abstract idea” in the slave, who acts in order to satisfy a desire without feeling it himself. He therefore works as a consequence of something unreal, of an idea which is a project to be realized. And that is why his work essentially transforms the natural given. Consequently, wherever there is work properly so called, there is necessarily Understanding (*Verstand*) also, i.e., the capacity for abstract notions, or if you prefer, for discursive Thought (*Denken, Sprache*). Man speaks while working. He speaks about his work and with a view to his work, and the whole ((consisting)) of these laborious discourses constitutes the vulgar (non-philosophical) *sciences* of the world and of man, sciences which are all more or less “technical”: they issue from work and finally end in work.

But, in speaking, the slave does not limit himself to describing the given world for the sake of transforming it through work. Not being recognized, not being, therefore, satisfied by and in the world, he *criticizes* it in his discourses or “negates” it verbally. And he constructs an imaginary world in its place, which is in conformity with his ideal of as yet unrealized satisfaction. It is in this way that the man who works in slavery necessarily forges the fictitious ideal universe of *Art* and of *Religion*. And that world evolves parallel to the real world in which the ideal is realized. Thus universal history, which is born from the “first” fight for recognition and which continues for as long as the desire for recognition is not fully satisfied, is not only a history of work, but also one of scientific and critical thought, as well as of art in all its forms and of religions.

But, basically, History is the history of bloody fights for pure prestige carried on with a view to universal recognition. On the one hand, each master seeks to be recognized by *all* men. And so the “State” of which he is a citizen is essentially warlike and aspires to universal empire. On the other hand, the slave does not content himself endlessly with the imaginary satisfactions that art and the religious beyond give him. He tries to make his masters recognize him. He therefore seeks to suppress them as masters. And that is why States in which there are slaves of any kind whatever (that is to say, “classes”) are the arena of bloody fights which have as their goal the establishment of social *homogeneity*. History is therefore a more or less uninterrupted sequence of foreign wars and bloody revolutions. But this sequence has an aim, and

consequently an end. For being born from the desire for recognition, history will necessarily stop at the moment at which this desire will be fully satisfied. Now this desire will be satisfied when each will be recognized in his reality and in his human dignity by *all* the others, these others being recognized by each in their reality and dignity ((a reality and dignity which are recognized as being)) equal to his own. In other words, history will stop when man will be perfectly satisfied by the fact of being a recognized citizen of a *universal and homogeneous State*, or, if you prefer, of a classless society comprising the whole of humanity.

The history which Hegel has in view is therefore "history" in the common sense of the term: political, social, economic history. And the history of the sciences, the arts and the religions is only, for Hegel, the history of "ideologies" which are born from the real historical process: they are a sort of ideal "superstructure" which only has a meaning and a possibility of being on the basis of a real "infrastructure," formed by the whole ((consisting)) of the political and social fights and works accomplished by man. But while stressing this, if you please, "materialistic" aspect of the Hegelian dialectic (which determined the whole thought of Marx), it should not be forgotten that this historical dialectic is, for Hegel, something essentially other than fight and work, than science, art and religion.

It is evident that the reality which is born from the desire for recognition and which realizes itself and objectifies itself through the fight for recognition can only be a reality *conscious of itself*. For it is evident that one can be truly "recognized" only if one oneself knows that one is recognized. (One never "recognizes" an animal or a thing, although one can very well *love* them.) That is why, by saying that man *is* Recognition, Hegel is also saying that he *is* Self-consciousness (*Selbstbewusstsein*, which, of course, implies and presupposes the consciousness of the external world, *Bewusstsein*). In other words, the satisfaction which the citizen of the universal and homogenous State derives from his recognized perfection is not "immediate" but "mediated" by the fullness of self-consciousness (and that is precisely why this satisfaction is truly human): man can only be perfectly satisfied if he is fully conscious of his satisfaction. Now, just as the real perfection of the citizen is the result of the whole historical evolution previous to his advent, so too the fullness of his self-consciousness is nothing but the integration of the (("experiences" of)) becoming conscious previously accomplished in the course of history. Universal history is therefore, in the final analysis, the history of self-Consciousness. Man fights and works to realize himself, but he only realizes himself in order to become conscious of himself by revealing himself to himself and to others through a coherent discourse having a meaning. Thus, history will stop at the very moment at which man becomes fully self-conscious.

To be sure, the fullness of self-consciousness can only be attained at the moment at which man is fully satisfied by his real existence. For as long as he is not ((satisfied)) he negates himself, trans-forms himself, becomes other than he is, and therefore other than the one of whom he had become conscious. His objective (historical) reality will surpass his self-consciousness and the

latter will not be truly complete or total, that is to say, enclosed upon itself. As long as there will be a possibility of negation or of action, there will always be something unconscious in man. But it is nevertheless true that the final aim, and consequently the prime mover, of historical (= dialectical) motion is satisfaction conscious of itself. Man seeks to be perfect only in order to be satisfied in the full consciousness of his perfection. He changes and moves only in order to go towards the fullness of consciousness.

Now the fullness of consciousness is called *Wisdom* and the motion which leads to it through the progressive extension of self-consciousness is called *Philosophy*. One can therefore say that, in the final analysis, universal history is the history of philosophy, which leads to the absolute Knowledge (*absolute Wissen*) of the Wise Man. If perfection that cannot be surpassed is synonymous with self-conscious Satisfaction, and if the latter is synonymous with omniscient Wisdom, one can say that history, once it is completed as a whole, is only there so that the Wise Man (named Hegel in this case) can objectify absolute Knowledge in the form of a book entitled *System of Science*.

This System is divided into two parts. In the first, which is at the same time an Introduction to the System, the Wise Man becomes fully self-conscious by rethinking the whole historical process which has given birth to him and which he integrates (by rethinking it); or, if you prefer, by describing the phenomenological aspect of the total dialectic. This first part is the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. And the second part is the exposition of the Science itself, that is to say the description of the ontological aspects (in the *Logic*) and metaphysical aspects (in the *Realphilosophie*, subdivided into the *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Philosophie des Geistes*) of the same dialectic that had been described, as “appearing” or revealed through the self-consciousness of the Wise Man, in the first part.

Thus, contrary to what Mr. Niel thinks (see pp. 16ff.), the “mediation” through the “speculative reflection” of the *Logic* and the *Encyclopedia* does not differ essentially from the “psychological mediation” through the *Phenomenology*. These are three aspects of one and the same thing, namely of the “mediation” of given-being through thought fully conscious of itself, which is born, in the final analysis, from the desire for recognition, when this desire is fully and definitively satisfied by the whole ((consisting)) of the works and fights which constitute universal political history, the latter being also the history of art, of religion and of philosophy.

In this last “mediation” through Hegelian Science, human reality becomes fully self-conscious. It therefore understands itself and reveals itself as it is in reality, that is to say, as essentially finite and mortal, since it was created, in the beginning, in and through an actual risk of life at the time of the “first” fight for recognition. In knowing itself to be mortal, it knows itself to live in a world without a beyond (*Jenseits*) or without God.

And so, what is most curious of all, man completes himself and perfects himself, that is to say, attains supreme satisfaction, through the ((“experience” of)) becoming conscious, in the person of the Wise Man, of his essential

finitude. For it is by knowing himself to be mortal, it is by accepting the idea of his death that the man who has become a Wise Man knows himself to be the absolute Spirit which has nothing beyond itself. And it is precisely this *absolute* or “universal” value which the “particularity” of the Wise Man possesses, ((a particularity that is)) objective in its Science which *is* the Truth, that constitutes the final “justification” of man, by revealing the profound meaning of all the “apparent absurdities of his historical past ((which has)) vanished forever.”

*Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht.* Universal history, which is at the same time the supreme Tribunal, acquits man in its final judgment, which is the only valid ((judgment)) because it is the only ((judgment that is)) possible and real. Now it is man who sits in this Tribunal, and he is the same as the one who is acquitted. And the man who succeeds in fully justifying himself to himself is perfectly satisfied by what he *is*. He will therefore not have any reason to change any more or to gainsay himself, so that all that he has said about himself, and therefore about man in general, in the fullness of his consciousness, will remain true forever. And that is why he *is* the Truth.

Mr. Niel does not acknowledge the essentially atheistic character of Hegel’s dialectical philosophy. He does not see that this philosophy excludes by its very nature every kind of “transmundane” transcendence. And this is why, in his interpretation, he cannot bring himself to ascribe to history all the importance that is has in genuine Hegelian thought.

To be sure, Mr. Niel admits that for Hegel “history alone is the place of Spirit” (p. 299). He also acknowledges that, in the Hegelian (= dialectical) conception, history must necessarily have an end (p. 300). Finally, he knows that it is precisely the advent of Hegel’s (dialectical) philosophy that marks the end of the historical process, “because through it becoming thinks itself as becoming” (p. 368). But Mr. Niel nevertheless speaks of a “divine” or “eternal” Spirit which is real outside of time and which only “incarnates” itself in history (see for example pp. 252 and 357). He distinguishes “temporal becoming” from “eternal becoming” (p. 181), the “essentially historical domain of activity” of the Spirit from its “supra-historical” activity (p. 180). He thinks he finds, in the *Phenomenology*, not an end properly so called of history, but a kind of “eternal return,” man being condemned “to endlessly repeat the series of forms through which he manifested himself” (p. 181). And Hegelian philosophy for him is not only the integration of the historical process but also “a transcendence ((*dépassement*)) of history” (p. 114).

Now, in fact, there can be no question in Hegel of a “transcendence” ((*dépassement*)) properly so called. Hegelian philosophy is, if you please, “beyond” history in the sense that it does not mark the beginning of a new historical period. Being an adequate description of the real, it negates nothing and therefore creates nothing real: it does not have a real or historical future before it. But it nevertheless forms part of the historical process, as its final point. Not only because it constitutes itself in time at an historical moment which it describes: it is nothing but “history conceptually understood”

(*begrieffene Geschichte*), that is to say, ((history)) described in its aspects: phenomenological, metaphysical, and ontological. And it is exclusively this (phenomenological) description which constitutes the “eternal return” that Mr. Niel has in mind: after the end of history, man can do nothing but perpetually rethink the historical process which has been completed and “understood” by the Wise Man (= Hegel).

As to notions such as “divine” or “eternal” Spirit, “eternal becoming,” “supra-historical activity,” etc. – they simply do not exist in Hegel. For Hegel “Spirit is Time” (*Geist ist Zeit*), and time is “the concept which empirically exists” (*der daseiende Begriff selbst*). There is therefore neither creative activity (= negation) nor conceptual thought outside of time. What is “outside” of time is at the very most space, i.e., the purely natural world, or static Being (*Sein*). Now static Being, since it is pure *identity*, does not *differ* from anything (*ne diffère de rien*). It also, therefore, is not different from “nothing” itself (*Il n'est donc pas non plus différent du “rien” lui-même*) or from Nothingness (*Nichts*). And that is why one can say that there is nothing outside of time, the “nothing” or Nothingness only being “something” in the form of time which realizes itself in the midst of space, of Nature, or of Being – as real or historical, viz., human, time.

Now if this is the case, the very criterion of truth has, in Hegel, an historical character. If history has an end, it is not because this end is affirmed or “demonstrated” by Hegelian philosophy, which is true “in itself” (or with respect to an eternal or divine truth). On the contrary, if this philosophy is true, it is exclusively because history has come to an end, it is because man no longer negates, no longer trans-forms the real revealed by the final philosophy, which, by this very fact, is no longer philosophy or quest for truth, but truth itself or Wisdom (absolute Knowledge).

Not seeing this “temporal” or historical character of Hegelian truth, which is *absolute* truth only because it is the *final* truth, Mr. Niel does not see the decisive importance which the *fact* of the end of history and of the man who, according to him, was the incarnation of this end, i.e. Napoleon, had for Hegel.

To be sure, Mr. Niel knows that Hegel was a fervent admirer of Napoleon and that he was “grief-stricken by his fall” (p. 268); but he says only in passing, and in a hesitating manner, that Napoleon is the result, the completion and the realization of the French Revolution (p. 165, note 84); and that the “kingdom of God on earth” that Hegel has in mind is nothing but the Napoleonic empire (p. 182). And, above all, he does not understand the true meaning of the last section of Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology*, which is of decisive importance.

As Mr. Niel sees very well, Chapter VI is devoted to a (phenomenological) description of the whole historical process from the Greek City to 1806. The second section (B) ends with an analysis of the Revolution of 1789 and announces – which Mr. Niel does not clearly see – the advent of the Napoleonic empire, that is to say, of the “universal and homogeneous” State. As for the last section (C) it is indeed devoted, as Mr. Niel says, to an analysis of

Kantian and post-Kantian German philosophy. But Mr. Niel does not notice that this philosophy is presented as a process which prepares for the advent of the philosophy of Hegel himself, and that the latter has as its essential aim to “explain” Napoleon, or to “justify” his Empire, by presenting it as the completion of universal history.

It is in the last paragraph of Chapter VI that Hegel speaks of his own philosophy (as resulting from the evolution of post-Kantian philosophy), in the paragraph which one could entitle (with Mr. Niel and following Lasson) *Evil and its Pardon*. Mr. Niel tells us that in this paragraph Hegel “abandons history properly so called in order to seek the metaphysical meaning [?] of concrete attitudes which belong to all times” (p. 174). Now, in fact, this is not at all the case. Hegel speaks there of himself as speaking of Napoleon. The “evil” in question is the supposed political “crime” of Napoleon, and the “pardon” is the justification of Napoleon’s achievement (*((l’œuvre napoléonienne))* by Hegel’s philosophy, or, more precisely, by his *Phenomenology*. The “acting consciousness” (see p. 175) is Napoleon as the “result” of universal history, and the “judging consciousness” is Hegel, the “judge” of Napoleon and of history, as the “result” of German philosophy, and, therefore, of the whole history of philosophy.

As long as one does not know that the unique theme of the paragraph is Napoleon and his critics, its content remains strictly unintelligible.\* Thus Mr. Niel’s summary of it (pp. 174ff.) is purely verbal and tolerably obscure, not to say devoid of meaning. In any case, the true meaning of the passage, which completes the paragraph and the chapter, and which is reproduced at the end of Mr. Niel’s summary (p. 176), completely escapes the reader who does not know the text and the context. Now this passage is the most remarkable of all.

In this passage Hegel speaks of the existence of “both I” and he says this about them: “The *Yes* of reconciliation in which both I desist from their opposed *empirical-existence (Dasein)*, is the empirical existence of the I extended to duality, of the I which remains equal in itself there; and which, in its complete alienation and in its contrary, has self-certainty; – this empirical – existence is the God who manifests himself in the midst of those who know themselves as pure knowledge.”

The “yes of reconciliation” is the very content of the paragraph, in which Hegel “reconciles” Germany, and himself as a German, with Napoleon. After this “reconciliation,” the I of Hegel is no longer really “opposed” to the I of Napoleon. On the one hand, because in the universal and homogeneous State Hegel the citizen and Napoleon the emperor cease to be German and French in order to become men plain and simple. On the other hand,

\* The passages on the “wounds of the spirit” which “leave no scars,” and on the “king” and the “valet de chambre” remain particularly unintelligible. The “wound” in question is the defeat inflicted by Napoleon on Germany, which ((country)) Hegel advises to willingly integrate itself into the universal empire that Napoleon is in the process of realizing; the “valets” – they are the essentially “hypocritical” critics of Napoleon.

because the philosophy of Hegel is a becoming conscious of Napoleon. By understanding Napoleon as the completion of history, Hegel understands *man* as such and therefore the man he himself is: the consciousness of the external (*Bewusstsein*) thus coincides with self-consciousness (*Selbstbewusstsein*). It is in Napoleon that Hegel finds “self-certainty.” He is sure of being a Wise Man possessing absolute Knowledge because, thanks to Napoleon, the reality which he describes is definitively completed. And since Napoleon (being originally, before the “reconciliation,” a Frenchman who is an *enemy* of the German) is really *other* than Hegel, Hegelian thought, which accounts for Napoleon, is more than a “subjective certainty” (*Gewissheit*): it is the revelation of an “objective-reality” (*Wirklichkeit*), that is to say, a *truth* (*Wahrheit*). Now the (Napoleonic) reality which it *reveals* is completed in itself. It is therefore perfect or absolute and, at the same time (thanks to Hegel), perfectly conscious of itself. It therefore is the absolute Spirit, the Spirit which Christians call “God.” And that is why one can say that Napoleon is the “appearing” or “revealed” “God” (*der erscheinende Gott*), “revealing” himself to or through Hegel and his disciples, that is to say, to and through those who know that they are henceforth only “pure knowledge”, that is to say, the “absolute Knowledge” which negates nothing, and therefore creates nothing, but reveals perfectly the real which is fully completed in and through its finished historical becoming.<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Niel is therefore right when he says that, for Hegel, “Christ is the perfect” dialectical “mediator” (p. 109). But in order for his assertion to be really true, he should have added that the Christ whom Hegel has in mind is not Jesus. The Gospel account is only the myth of Christ, or, if you please, his project (= ideal to be realized). The Christ who empirically exists, the God who actually reveals himself to men, the Logos truly become flesh – is the dyad Napoleon-Hegel, is the man completing historical evolution through a bloody battle (*(lutte)*) coupled with the man revealing through his discourse the meaning of this evolution.

Now Mr. Niel does not say that (even though he mentions, p. 369, the analogy between Christ and Hegel). He cannot say that because, not having understood the essentially atheistic character of Hegelian (= dialectical) philosophy, he does not see the decisive role which the real completion (= Napoleon) of concrete history plays in it. Inversely, not seeing that “absolute

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<sup>5</sup> In a famous letter quoted by Mr. Niel (p. 268), Hegel says that having finished the *Phenomenology*, he saw at dawn the “soul of the world” ride on horseback under his windows. This text is revealing. The victor of Jena is called in it the “*soul of the world*”: he is *Welt-seele*, and not *Volks-seele*; he incorporates not the history of the French people, but that of the whole of humanity. But he is *Welt-seele* and not *Welt-geist*. He is not Spirit, because he is not fully self-conscious; through his actions he in fact completes history, but he does not know that he is doing this and that he realizes absolute Spirit by doing it. It is Hegel who knows this and who says it in the *Phenomenology*. Absolute Spirit or “God” is therefore neither Napoleon nor Hegel, but Napoleon-understood-by-Hegel or Hegel-understanding-Napoleon.

“Spirit” is nothing but the history of man completed by a man (or by two men), he can attempt to give a theistic interpretation of the Hegelian Spirit.

One might even assume that Mr. Niel, following most other interpreters of Hegel, refuses to acknowledge Hegelian atheism precisely because this “trans-Christian” atheism preserves the idea of Christ, by applying it to a man properly so called, “conceived in sin” and radically mortal.<sup>6</sup> For it is very difficult even for an atheist to really take seriously this paradoxical and yet necessary consequence of Hegelianism (and probably of any “dialectical” philosophy, or even of any consistent or coherent atheism that does not want to founder in relativism). As for the believer, he must – unconsciously – recoil from the enormity of this blasphemy and try to deny its existence: even if the blasphemy is uttered by another; even if he knows or believes he knows that this other is grossly mistaken.

However that may be, Mr. Niel wants to hear nothing of Hegelian atheism, or of the Napoleonic “theandry.” On the contrary, he believes that he finds the Christ of the Gospels again in Hegel, and he goes so far as to say (p. 329) that Hegel was less a philosopher than a theologian.<sup>7</sup>

And yet, Mr. Niel is very suspicious of the alleged Hegelian theology. He senses an enemy in it, and a particularly formidable enemy. Thus, he ends the summaries of what he believes to be the “stages” of Hegelian thought by affirming the “failure” of the examined attempt at “mediation”. And the entire book ends with a paragraph entitled: *The Failure* (p. 376).

Now, in my opinion, the alleged “failure” of Hegel is affirmed rather than demonstrated by Mr. Niel. One has the impression that he wanted to present the enemy as beaten before having even started the fight and perhaps precisely in order to avoid starting it. But the last critical paragraph of the book nevertheless does raise some questions which deserve to be considered.

Mr. Niel tells us that “the only possible refutation of Hegelianism” is of necessity historical. In this he is profoundly Hegelian (= “dialectical”) and I would be the last to raise any objections whatsoever against him. But when he says that this refutation has already been made, because history did not stop with Hegel, I would like to put some objections to him.

<sup>6</sup> I do not dwell on the very significant modifications that Hegel had to make in his conception as a consequence of Napoleon’s fall. That he thought at a given moment that he could substitute the Archduke of Austria for his “Napoleon,” or that he ended by pretending to believe that the perfect and definitive State begun by Napoleon was realized by the kingdom of Prussia, which, however, was not “universal” and did not aspire to universality, matters little. What matters is that, according to him, Napoleon disappeared because he had (virtually) ended his work and that this work definitively completed history properly so called ((i.e., history as) creative of new historical “worlds.” In any case, it is therefore man plain and simple, and not the Man-God, who realizes perfection.

<sup>7</sup> In a certain sense this is, moreover, true. But this sense can only be an ironic one. If Hegel did, indeed, concern himself with theo-logy all his life, this was exclusively with a view to “surpressing” it definitively as *theo-logy* or as the science of a God who is transcendent with respect to man.

Mr. Niel rightly does not follow those who want to “refute” Hegel by alleging the fact of Kierkegaard’s existence against him. For the existence of Kierkegaard does not, in fact, “refute” anything at all, given that he was duly described and “refuted” through the description of real historical overcoming (*(dépassement)*) in the *Phenomenology*. Mr. Niel, still a good Hegelian, alleges, in opposition of Hegel’s claim to have enunciated the absolute truth, the fact of the immediate appearance of a Hegelian “left” and of a Hegelian “right,” which continue to confront each other down to the present. And this “objection” is, indeed, valid, even from the Hegelian or “dialectical” point of view. But one would have to state precisely what merit this “objection” really has.

I would like to point out, in the first place (without knowing whether Mr. Niel shares my point of view), that if there has been from the beginning a Hegelian left and right, this is also *all* that there has been since Hegel. For if one abstracts from the remnants of the past which Hegel knew and described (“liberalism” included), and which, consequently, cannot be alleged in opposition to him as an historical or “dialectical” refutation, one observes that there has been strictly nothing outside of Hegelianism (whether conscious or not), whether on the plane of historical reality itself, or on that of such thought or discourse as has had historical repercussions. And so one cannot say, with Mr. Niel, that history has refuted *Hegelianism*. The most one can assert is that it has not decided between the “leftist” and the “rightist” interpretations of Hegelian philosophy. For today the discussion still continues.

Now, according to Hegel, a discussion can only be settled by reality, that is to say, by the realization of one of the theses that confront each other. Verbal polemics or “dialectics” only reflect the real dialectic, which is a dialectic of Action manifesting itself as Struggle (*(Lutte)*) and Work. And in effect it is as work (“economic system”), revolutions and wars that the polemic between “Hegelians” has been taking place for nearly 150 years. Recently the left has won a brilliant victory, and it would be absurd to conclude from it that it is the “right” that will finally win. But it would be just as false to say that the provisionally victorious interpretation has definitely proved itself to be true.

In our time, as in the time of Marx, Hegelian philosophy is not a truth in the proper sense of the term: it is less the adequate discursive revelation of a reality, than an idea or an ideal, that is to say, a “project” which is to be realized, and therefore proved true, through action. However, what is remarkable is that it is precisely because it *is* not yet true that this philosophy alone is capable of *becoming* true one day. For it alone says that truth is created in time out of error and that there are no “transcendent” criteria (whereas a theistic theory of necessity either has always been true, or is forever false). And that is why history will never refute Hegelianism, but will limit itself to choosing between its two opposed interpretations.

One can therefore say that, for the moment, every interpretation of Hegel, if it is more than idle talk, is nothing but a program of struggle (*(lutte)*) and one of work (and one of these “programs” is called *Marxism*). And this

means that the work of an interpreter of Hegel takes on the meaning of a work of political propaganda. Mr. Niel therefore quite rightly says, in concluding, that "Hegelianism is of more than purely literary interest." For it may be that, in fact, the future of the world, and therefore the meaning of the present and the significance of the past, depend, in the final analysis, on the way in which the Hegelian writings are interpreted today.

This last remark may perhaps justify the unusual length of the present review in the reader's eyes.